

# Please Get Your Child Vaccinated

By ANJUM NAIM

ANSAR NAIM



On my third birthday, I developed a fever, and on the fourth day, I started falling down. My right leg started limping. My parents thought it might be due to some injury or sprain. A number of oils and ointments were applied. The doctor who used to visit our village every morning on his bicycle also treated and plastered the affected leg for a month. But all these efforts were useless. A *moulvi sahib* from the nearby mosque, who came every evening to invoke the blessings of the Almighty upon me, declared with complete confidence and conviction that it was an attack by an evil spirit. He said it could be cured only with the blessings of saints.

Cradled in the feeble arms of my mother, Mariam Begum, while her tears rolled down her face to drench my embroidered brocade clothes, I could only watch her helplessness and disappointment with a child's inability to gauge its intensity.

"We left no shrine or mausoleum where we did not pay our homage," my mother told me. "We contacted every saint to obtain his supplications in the form of *Imam Zamin* to be tied to the arm as an offering to the guardian-saint.

And there was no Friday night when we did not light a candle of hope in the niche of the mosque. But it seemed as though the evil spirit was determined to put out every flame of hope and desire." My parents, at last, submitted to the will of the Almighty after three years of continuous pain and agony. My father, Naimuddin, consoled *Amma*, saying, "Irrespective of his disability, he is the light of our home. It is he who will kindle a lamp at our doorstep." His patient words masked the heartache of the fiasco and failure that had surrounded all the attempts to heal me.

In early 1962, my father came to know about a missionary health clinic near his paper shop in Kolkata, where paralyzed limbs of disabled children were treated through physical exercises. He immediately called me from my village, Astipur, in Bihar's Hajipur district. My physiotherapy continued for months. Suddenly, the China-India war broke out and people departed Kolkata en masse. We also

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*Mariam Begum and her son Anjum Naim at the family home in Bihar.*

left for the village, abandoning the treatment. However, due to the exercises I had learned, I became able to walk without any support. My physiotherapist, Sister Thomas, was an extremely caring, loving and sincere nun. She told us that any further improvement was not possible. She also convinced my father that the ailment was due to a disease called polio and not because of the curse of any evil spirit.

The Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) had been developed in America and became readily available in Indian medical clinics and hospital pharmacies before my father's death in 1996. Whenever he heard about the birth of any child, he used to reach there immediately to persuade the family to get the newborn vaccinated against polio and other deadly diseases. It became the one and only mission of his life. I also hope to continue his mission until my last breath.

—An excerpt from the unpublished autobiography, *Tale of an Ordinary Man*.

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